THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHR1 BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) and (b) It has been decided by the Government to fix the fare for Haj pilgrims at Rs. 12,000. For the balance amount, subsidy will be provided. The matter of reduction in subsidy is to be examined by the Ministry of Civil Aviation separately.

Inflation rate

525. SHRIMATI VANG A GEETHA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Inflation rate touched an almost two decade low during the recent week; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The annual point to point inflation rate (based on Wholesale Price Index) in the first six months of 2001-02 (April-September) remained close to 5 per cent level. It started declining after September to reach a low 1.13 per cent in the week ending February 9, 2002 which was the lowest since January 27, 1979, when the inflation rate had touched a low level of 1 per cent. There was virtually no price rise in the manufactured sector which registered just about 0.2 per cent annual price rise by February, 2002, though in the primary product group, which includes agriculture commodities, the price rise was 3.17 per cent. The effect of the rise in prices of the fuel group experienced last year, due to an increase in administered prices of fuel products, evened out during 2001-02 and the annual inflation in the fuel group stood at 1.6 per cent in February, 2002.

UTIs holdings in five companies

526. SHRI RUMANDLA RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Unit Trust of India has sought Government's approval to divest holdings in five companies;

(b) if so, the details of these companies;

(c) whether their proposal has been approved; and

(d) if so, by when final decision in this regard is likely to be taken?